

FITNESS

Working with Your Doctor to Overcome Overweight and Obesity

Time for a change

Some Americans who are overweight or obese find it difficult to lose the unwanted pounds. This is a major public health issue because being overweight can lead to serious health problems. Every year in the United States, about 300,000 adults die from causes related to excess body weight.

We cannot change our genetic make-up, but the good news is that we can make a difference in two of the key factors that contribute to premature death: cigarette smoking and eating habits. Millions of Americans have already improved their health by giving up smoking. Individually, in our communities, and as a country, it is time for us to make a comparable change in the way we eat. This type of change is needed in order to address the epidemic of overweight and obesity in the United States.

Consulting your doctor about weight control

Talk to your doctor about healthy eating and physical activities that can help you lose weight, improve your fitness, and decrease the chances of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, or type 2 diabetes. Be sure to set realistic goals. Small changes can make a surprising difference in your health. Your doctor can offer practical suggestions that do not require a complete overhaul of your current way of life. In some cases, your physician may refer you to a nutrition specialist, such as a registered dietitian, for in-depth counseling about food choices. You may want to start the conversation by asking a few questions of your own. For example:

- Ask your doctor for any educational brochures on topics such as eating habits, counting calories, or physical activity
- Request to have your BMI measured and ask your doctor what it means with regard to your health status
- Have your waist circumference measured and discuss the significance of the measurement with your doctor
- Be prepared to describe your current diet and activity level and what changes might promote better health
- Think about how much change you're willing to make before you visit your doctor
- Ask if specialists are available on your health plan and in your area, such as dietitians or physical trainers

